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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Association of Presbyterian Women of Aoteaora (New Zealand), Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Global Action on Aging, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church USA, Salvation Army, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, World Student Christian Federation and World Young Women's Christian Association, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.

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Statement*

1. Ecumenical Women, a coalition of Christian organizations and denominations and other non-governmental organizations, welcome the sixteenth-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action at the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations.

2. We uphold women and girls as relational beings created as equal partners of our male counterparts in the image of God, and thus oppose all forms of gender-based violence, discrimination and oppression.

3. We affirm the promotion of gender equality and justice from a human rights perspective. We maintain that the contributions and empowerment of women and girls of all ages are fundamental, enshrined in the Platform and international laws, and necessary to meet all the Millennium Development Goals.

4. Despite 16 years of national policies and international agreement to advance women's rights, the goals of the Platform and the Goals remain unfulfilled because of unacknowledged systems of power. At the root of all challenges facing women and girls in our work today is the underlying paradigm of patriarchy, or the belief that men are superior to and more valuable than women.

5. The Platform will remain unfulfilled unless it is recognized that existing institutional structures are inherently gender-biased and need to be critically examined and radically transformed.

6. Implementations have failed to recognize the full diversity of women's situations and the multiplicity of challenges they face.

7. The review process must take complexities, differences and intervention strategies into account. As Ecumenical Women, we commit ourselves as partners in the process.

8. Talks, resolutions and implementations have failed to address language bias used as a tool to disempower women: for example, calling assaults or attacks against women in their homes "domestic violence" and not "criminal acts".

9. Ecumenical Women works to bring about a paradigm shift; deconstructing patriarchy and building a paradigm of mutual partnership. Without a shift at such a basic level, any work towards improving life for women and girls will only scratch the surface.

Education and decent work

10. Education is an essential human right. It is a global portal to address cultural practices of gender-based violence. Education increases girls' and women's participation in society impacts the welfare of their families and communities, and advances the progress of the Goals in areas such as reducing maternal and child mortality. Access to secondary education increases women's rights awareness, autonomy, empowerment, and can open the way for full employment and decent work.

* Issued without formal editing.

11. Decent work protects and promotes human dignity and is central to any effort to eradicate poverty and bring sustainable development at a global level. More women than men are either unemployed or working in an informal economy with no social protection or social security.

12. Paradigms of patriarchy reinforce ideas that women should not or cannot be educated, hold prestigious positions, create valuable new technologies, or be paid the same as men. These paradigms can also keep us from critical examination of seemingly positive results.

13. Although some regions can celebrate the increasing enrolment of girls and boys in primary education, a different story appears when a gender perspective intersects with race/ethnicity, national origin, geographic location and economic background. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) reports that while some countries reached gender parity in secondary attendance, poor girls and those in rural areas are neglected, especially in the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

14. Enrolment in school does not always equal quality education. A quality education demands a relevant curriculum in a healthy and safe school environment to foster gender equality and a life free of violence and discrimination in order to strengthen girls' decision-making power, and to enable their comprehensive knowledge in literacy, numeracy and the arts. Quality education will aid in breaking down gender stereotypes that keep girls and women away from the fields of science and technology.

15. Even in countries in Latin America, where more women than men completed their secondary education, this advantage does not always translate to women having better opportunities to access jobs and decent work. The persistence of gender-economic injustice and occupational segregation due to the gender stereotyping and racial discrimination of dominant paradigms must be addressed.

Impact of the global economic crisis

16. The global economic crisis aggravates women's access to full employment and decent work, as women's work is largely undervalued and seen as non-essential.

17. An increase in number of women heads of household, and especially in these situations, full employment and decent work are keys to women overcoming poverty and being able to care for their families and communities.

18. The global economic crisis is placing education at risk and jeopardizing the limited progress made, especially in developing countries and for minority populations in developed countries.

Science and technology

19. In its agreed conclusions on funding gender and the empowerment of women, the Commission notes the growing body of evidence demonstrating that investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect. Increasing women's economic empowerment and access to science and technology is central to the achievement of the Goals and adequate resources need to be allocated at all levels, mechanisms and capacities need to be strengthened, and gender responsive policies need to be enhanced to fully utilize the multiplier effect.

20. Women must be able to define their own technological needs, and be empowered to fulfil them at all levels of science and technology research and development.

21. Through skills training and microcredit, we can see the impact of women having the means and opportunities to invest in simple technology such as a sewing machine, basic agricultural technology and more efficient cooking devices. In many cases, the first investment eventually allows women to employ and provide decent work for other women.

Access to information technology and its connection to decent work

22. The lack of women in science and technology jobs affects women's access to higher income jobs, the talent pool and their potential influence over the science research agenda, leading to the neglect of topics affecting their well-being.

23. Women's access to employment is constrained by patriarchal paradigms, including sole responsibility for caregiving, early marriage and childbearing, restrictions on women's physical mobility, lack of acceptance of women in workforce and employer bias.

24. Women who do succeed in careers in science, engineering and technology are marginalized by patriarchal paradigms that dictate whether women are able to or should do this type of work, foster hostile hypermasculine cultures, and perpetuate sexual harassment.

25. Ecumenical Women therefore urges:

(a) The United Nations:

- To challenge the dominant paradigm of patriarchy to one of mutual partnership:

(i) Conduct a study on the existing paradigm, including self-assessment of what the practice of having male Secretaries-General since the birth of the United Nations means in relation to its pursuit of gender justice;

(ii) Challenge gender stereotypes in order to encourage the involvement of young women in careers of science, engineering and technology, areas in which female participation was once considered near impossible;

(iii) Motivate men to partner in ending violence and discrimination against women through positive masculinity training, gender awareness and learning about human rights;

(iv) Address the causes of limited representation of women and girls in science and technology, such as socialization and cultural stereotyping of gender roles, and the gender, attitude and teaching approach of teachers and counsellors;

(v) Create special initiatives to integrate young women in a gender disaggregated workforce;

(vi) Ensure that mechanisms of social protection for decent work reach women in all communities, including women in rural or remote areas;

(b) Governments:

- To creatively advocate for a new paradigm:

(i) Intensify well-accessed and well-monitored collaboration with men's initiatives that work towards gender justice such as the White Ribbon Campaign, MenEngage, and Women Peacemakers Program Masculinities Project;

(ii) Make concrete moves to remove gender stereotyping in science textbooks;

(iii) Seek funding for research projects on various aspects of the problems of women's access to science and technology education;

(iv) Acknowledge and publish the contributions of women scientists and technologists through the awarding of national honours;

(v) Encourage bilateral mentoring partnerships between girls and women;

- To advance this paradigm shift in practical ways, it further urges Governments to:

(i) Formulate and enforce policies that will increase females' enrolment in science in secondary schools;

(ii) Provide scholarships to women and girls who demonstrate capability in science and technology education;

(iii) Provide adequate science laboratory facilities in schools;

(iv) Provide incentives to science and technology teachers to boost confidence and increase their level of commitment;

(v) Create policy for gender sensitization training and gender auditing of the existing curriculum, specifically in the areas of science and technology education;

(vi) Protect education budgets from the global economic crisis; otherwise generations of girls will be trapped in poverty and discrimination.

Review of agreed conclusion from the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women

26. In the agreed conclusion from the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the States Members of the United Nations affirmed that the empowerment of girls requires the active support and engagement of their parents, legal guardians, families, boys and men, and the wider community.

27. Again, Ecumenical Women advocates that a shift in our patriarchal paradigm must take place in order to achieve these goals.

Education and training is the key

28. Access to training enables girls to develop leadership capacities and ensures they can fully participate in their societies. Education and job skills programmes are needed for girls, with attention to how our current paradigms shape what we believe girls and women are capable of learning and doing.

Poverty

29. Girl children living in poverty need improvement in all aspects of their lives and living conditions, as they are often considered less important that their brothers when it comes to expenses such as medical care, education, and even food.

Violence against girls

30. All forms of violence against girls must be condemned, including physical, mental, psychological, and sexual violence, torture, homophobia, child abuse and exploitation, hostage-taking, domestic violence, trafficking in or sale of children or their organs, paedophilia, child prostitution, child pornography, child sex tourism, gang-related violence, and harmful practices in all settings.

31. Ecumenical Women therefore urges the United Nations to fully implement all international agreements, including the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action, Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009) on women, peace and security, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

32. It also urges Governments to:

(a) Work for deep changes in society and our commonly held paradigms to end discrimination;

(b) Provide safe school environments for girls in their communities, improve education for girls and address the reasons girls fail to attend school or complete their education, such as bullying or cultural practices;

(c) Ensure resources and technical assistance to help develop girls' skills and education;

(d) Integrate gender perspective in developing programmes and policies;

(e) Raise awareness of all types of violence, and how violence harms girls and undermines gender equality;

(f) Encourage all people to actively participate in the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence;

(g) Ensure age-appropriate and gender-sensitive services to girls;

(h) Ensure education about girls' rights by all people at all levels;

(i) Develop and implement appropriate laws and programmes.